

Wesleyan Democrats



Presented to Judiciary Committee

March 4, 2009

In Support of Proposed H.B. No. 6578 An Act Concerning the Penalty For a Capital Felony

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The Wesleyan Democrats find the death penalty in the state of Connecticut to be unconscionable and therefore strongly endorse this bill to abolish it for those who are convicted of hereafter committing felonies that are presently considered capital.

The death penalty carries far too great a risk of executing innocent people. 130 American death row inmates have been found innocent since 1973. The ongoing legal struggle over the life of Troy Davis in Georgia, whose guilt is far from certain, reminds us of capital punishment's chilling irreversibility.

We are disturbed by the death penalty's unjust toll on the poor and on racial and ethnic minorities. Seven out of ten Connecticut death row inmates are persons of color. Nationwide, since 1976, 79% of homicide victims in cases resulting in capital punishment have been white. According to data published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, African Americans have ranged from 6 to 7 times more likely than whites to be victims of homicide in that same period. This signifies clear racial discrimination in death sentences, which we find intolerable.

Furthermore, the death penalty is ineffective in deterring crime and places an unnecessary financial burden on the state. A recent New York Times article outlined ongoing several state abolition efforts being propelled by budget concerns, and cited a study showing that in Maryland, death penalty cases cost nearly three times as much as non-death penalty cases.

We advocate retroactive death penalty abolition for current death row inmates, which is not included in this bill. Ultimately, Connecticut must join with the two-thirds of the world's countries that have ceased this inhumane practice. However, we feel that enacting H.B. No. 6578 would signal powerful progress in securing human rights and justice, and we offer our strong support.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dan Fischer, Secretary
Brad Spahn, President
Corrine Duffy, Vice President
Vignatha Reddy, Treasurer
Liza Conrad & Max Rothstein, Social Chairs

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